

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SPTA-02 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 05637

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, PN
SUBJ: REPORTED KILLING BY NATIONAL GUARD

REF: PANAMA 5226

1. EMBOFF DISCUSSED SUBJECT CASE ON AUGUST 3 WITH
NATIONAL GUARD (GN) OFFICIAL RECENTLY DESIGNATED AS
"LIAISON OFFICER" FOR HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS. THIS
SPOKESMAN CONVEYED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

A. THE NATIONAL GUARD OFFICER INVOLVED IN THE ALLEGED
KILLING (FELIX CENTENO) WAS NOT ACTING UNDER GUARD ORDERS.
HE IS NOW UNDER ARREST. NORMAL JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS ARE
BEING FOLLOWED, AND HE WILL BE BROUGHT TO TRIAL.

B. THE REPORTED INCIDENT BEGAN WHEN A BUS, RETURNING
FROM THE TORRIJOS-CARTER RALLY IN PANAMA CITY ON JUNE 16,
WAS SHOT AT. THE BUS DRIVER REPORTED THE INCIDENT TO THE
NATIONAL GUARD, AND THE GUARD BEGAN AN INVESTIGATION OF
THE REPORT AT THE SITE OF THE "SHOOTING". THE VICTIM,
RAMON RIVERA, AND SEVERAL OF HIS COMPANIONS, ALL MEMBERS
OF THE PANAMENISTA PARTY, WERE TAKEN TO A LOCAL GUARD
HEADQUARTERS FOR QUESTIONING. IN THE COURSE OF THE
QUESTIONING OF RIVERA, WHO WAS MORE OR LESS THE
"RINGLEADER", RIVERA BECAME VERBALLY ABUSIVE OF CENTENO,
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WHO THEN STRUCK RIVERA. RIVERA FELL TO THE FLOOR.
HE DIED AS A RESULT OF THE BLOW DEALT BY CENTENO AND THE
FALL. RIVERA'S COMPANIONS, GOING TO HIS DEFENSE, GOT
INVOLVED IN A GENERAL BRAWL WITH SEVERAL GUARD OFFICERS.
THIS ASPECT OF THE INCIDENT IS UNDER INVESTIGATION. (THE
SPOKESMAN DID NOT REPORT THAT ANY OTHER GUARD OFFICERS
HAD BEEN ARRESTED.)

C. PANAMA'S ATTORNEY GENERAL HAS DISCUSSED THE CASE WITH THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT AND JUSTICE. THE MINISTER HAS PROVIDED INFORMATION ON THE CASE TO "THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE IN WASHINGTON," AT THE COMMITTEE'S REQUEST. (EMBOFF UNDERSTOOD THE SPOKESMAN TO MEAN THE OAS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, AND HE CONFIRMED THAT HE THOUGHT THAT WAS WHAT THE "COMMITTEE" WAS CALLED.)

2. THE ABOVE INFORMATION SHOULD BE USED WITH DISCRETION. IT CONFORMS BASICALLY WITH THE INITIAL "MATUTINO" ARTICLE ON THE INCIDENT (PANAMA 4549) WHICH, ALTHOUGH NOT SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED AS SUCH, CAN BE UNDERSTOOD TO REPRESENT THE GOVERNMENT'S SIDE OF THE STORY. THE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE GN SPOKESMAN HAS NOT BEEN MADE AVAILABLE IN ANY KIND OF A PUBLIC STATEMENT. AT THIS POINT, WE ARE UNABLE TO VERIFY IT.

3. ARA/PAN MAY WISH TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF COMPARING NOTES ON THIS ISSUE WITH THE OAS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION. ACCORDING TO THE SAME PANAMENISTA PARTY SOURCE CITED REFTEL, THE COMMISSION INTENDS TO UNDERTAKE AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENT. JORDEN

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Message Attributes

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